

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF HATE SPEECHES IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Political campaign, as an integral part of democracy, thrives on the centrality of language use. The 2015 general election in Nigeria witnessed a campaign of calumny, full of inflammatory rhetoric and verbal attacks on perceived political opponents, capable of truncating the country's nascent democracy. Hence, this paper examines, from perspective of pragmatics, instances of hate speeches made by political actors during the 2015 general election campaigns in Nigeria with the aim of revealing their pragmatic import. Since language is an instrument of action, the Speech Act theory (SAT) by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) serves as our theoretical framework. The data analysed were retrieved from publications of purposively selected Nigerian newspapers and magazine between 2012 and 2015. A total number of 20 (twenty) speeches were selected and subjected to illocutionary act analysis (direct and indirect) which brings the total speech acts performed to 40 (forty). The perlocutionary effects of the locutions were also measured from the illocutionary force of each utterance. The findings revealed that campaign speeches made prior to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria serve as weapons of intimidation, blackmail, incitement and coercion and thus created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety within the polity. Based on this, the paper recommends enlightenment programmes on the tenets of democracy and good governance for all citizens to protect Nigeria's nascent democracy.

KEY WORDS: Hate Speeches, Political Campaign, Election, Democracy, Political Actors

INTRODUCTION

Language has been used by man for numerous activities in the society. As an instrument of communication, language may be used to influence personality, declare war, oppose ideas, intentions and actions. It could also be used to scatter, condemn, generate violence, entertain, inspire, educate, establish cordial relationship, settle disputes, and make peace with people or communities (Obuh and Omenogor, 2012). Language performs a crucial role in politics. It serves as a means of mass mobilization and political participation. It is a medium of discussing and encoding socio-political policies which may engineer political stability or polarization. In other words, it can serve to truncate democracy or sustain it and effect national development. Discussing the inter-relationship between language and politics, Opeibi (2004) states:

Political thoughts and ideologies can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and social continuity through the facilities provided by language...One can further assert that since language is dynamic in nature and politics itself is a dynamic process, the social roles of language- especially in serving as a tool to mobilize the people to support political candidates- show how language can contribute to the realization of political goals

In a democratic setting where campaigns and quest for power are mostly determined by ability to convince and win popular support, language plays an important role of mobilizing people and canvassing votes. During campaigns, political actors and parties rely on rhetoric to spread the beliefs, ideology and promises of their political party in order to woo the electorate. This accounts for Ayoade's (1982) submission that "language is the conveyor belt of power which moves people to vote, debate or revolt". Accordingly Beard (2000) opines that:

political campaigns, with their speeches, their written texts, their broadcasts, need to inform and instruct voters about issues that are considered to be of great importance; ultimately all the written and spoken texts that are produced during an election campaign are designed to persuade people to do one thing: to vote in a certain way (p, 57).

Political campaigns are systematically related to communicative actions of political discourse aimed at doing things with words to achieve certain goal. However the Nigerian political scenery has been full of tension generated by hate speeches made by politicians prior to the 2015 general elections. The political gladiators were at each others' jugular; making inflammatory statements during campaigns and rallies preceding the elections forgetting that political discourse during election campaigns can impact positively or negatively on democratic governance (Opeibi, 2009). Their rhetoric sounded more like beating of the "drum of war" against perceived political opponents; it lacked every form of decency and decorum and thereby aggravating the already tensed political atmosphere. This was an obvious violation of Section 95 of the Electoral Act 2010 (as amended) which also regulates political campaigns. This section of the Act, in sub-sections 1 and 2 clearly states that:

- A political campaign or slogan shall not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal or sectional feelings.
- Abusive, intemperate, slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reactions or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns.

As the hate speeches continued, the citizens became apprehensive about the outcome of the elections which propelled the statement credited to Dr. Junaid Mohammed, as reported in The Nation newspaper of March 17, 2013 that:

- Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general elections are
- free and fair, it may be the last election in the history of the nation

In the light of the above, this paper attempts a pragmatic study of hate speeches made during the 2015 general election campaigns in Nigeria.

HATE SPEECH AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA'S CONTEXT

The practice of democracy hinges on the principle of freedom of speech and expression. This democratic norm is fully displayed during political campaigns when practical expressions of ideology come to the fore. However, such campaigns are sometimes characterized by hate speeches. According to UNESCO (2015) report, hate speech is regarded as:

expressions that advocate incitement to harm (particularly, discrimination, hostility or violence) based upon the target's being identified with a certain social or demographic group. It may include, but is not

limited to, speech that advocates, threatens, or encourages violent acts. For some, however, the concept extends also to expressions that foster a climate of prejudice and intolerance on the assumption that this may fuel targeted discrimination, hostility and violent attacks.

Hate speech is regarded as “words that wound” which can lead to harm and violence. It speech relies on tensions, which it seeks to produce and amplify. Hate speech refers to a whole spectrum of negative discourse, stretching from hate or prejudice and inciting to hatred, with the aim to degrade, intimidate, or incite violence or prejudicial action against a person or group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language ability, moral or political views, etc.

The contest for political offices in Nigeria during the last general elections was ferocious with politicians making inciting remarks that could ignite violence and unrest. This was obvious in the speeches of two dominating parties in Nigeria’s political scenario: PDP (People’s Democratic Party) and APC (All Progressive Congress). It is worthy to note here that Nigeria practices a multi-party democracy with 29 registered political parties. Out of these 29 political parties, the PDP and APC have muscled others out of contention in the Presidential race and only the candidates of the two contested for the apex political position. As a result, the battle line was drawn between the two ‘big’ political parties in the country with their aspirants and party members making inflammatory remarks and unguided expressions capable of engendering violence in the country before and after the election. The hate speeches made by members and sympathizers of the two political parties, as reported in the national newspapers and magazines are extracted for analysis in this study were

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data for this work were gathered from instances of hate speeches as reported in some selected newspapers and magazine in Nigeria. They were purposively selected because of their reportage of instances of hate speeches required for this study. The selected newspapers and magazine include: Tell Magazine, Leadership, Nigerian Tribune, Premium Times, Osun Defender, Punch Newspaper, The Sun Newspaper, Vanguard Newspaper, News Express and Guardian Newspaper. Other sources include: Sahara Reporters and The Herald that are published online. The selected speeches were drawn from the discourse of political actors with affiliations to the two dominating political parties in Nigeria (APC and PDP) between 2012 and 2015, prior to the general elections. The linguistic framework for the study is the Speech Act theory by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). A total number of 20 (twenty) speeches were selected and subjected to illocutionary act analysis (direct and indirect) which brings the total number of speech acts performed to 40 (forty). The perlocutionary effects of the locutions on the hearer (s) were also measured from the illocutionary force of each utterance. Efforts were made to calculate the percentage of each speech act type based on its frequency so as to make the interpretation of the table clear and empirical. Thus we have:

- $\frac{\text{Frequency of a speech act}}{\text{Total number of speech acts}} \times 100$
- Total number of speech acts

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for this study is the Speech Act theory (SAT) enunciated by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969). The theory shows how speakers (and writers) “do things with words”. Austin and Searle recognised that language is a tool for performing actions and that the “meaning” we associate with an utterance is the

user's intention, and not the meaning of words in the utterance. In other words, communication is successful not when hearers recognize the linguistic meaning of the utterance, but when they infer the speaker's "meaning" from it (Sperber and Wilson, 1986:23). The intentional character of speech acts is among their most distinctive classificatory features (Mey, 2001). When we study the user's intention, we are studying what s/he does with words, either in speech or writing. According to Lawal (1997):

Speech act theory and indeed the whole of pragmatic theory is essentially concerned with how interlocutors (speakers and listeners) understand one another. In spite of the possibility of their saying what they do not mean and meaning what they do not say, it is this possibility of indirectness and implicitness of meaning which recommended pragmatics as a useful analytical tool in literary criticism *and other fields of human communication requiring language use and meaning* (italics mine) (p, 132)

Since the theory of speech act shows how speakers (and writers) "do things with words", (Austin, 1962) identifies three fundamental acts that are performed by speakers namely *locutionary act* – uttering a sentence with no ambiguous meaning, through the grammar, phonology and semantic of a language; *illocutionary act* – performing an act by uttering a sentence, where the real intention of the speaker is encoded either to promise, condemn, invite, christen or sentence to prison; *Perlocutionary act* – is the effect the utterance might have. The pragmatic content of any utterance is captured in the illocutionary act because that is where the intention of the speaker is demonstrated.

The theory of speech acts is partly taxonomic and partly explanatory. It systematically classifies types of speech acts and the ways in which they can succeed or fail. Searle (1969) proposes five acts which may be regarded as an extension of Austin's illocutionary acts. The acts are representative, declarative, directive, expressive and commissive.

- **Representatives or Assertives:** speech acts that commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, e.g. reciting, asserting, claiming, describing, concluding, reporting, suggesting, predicting, stating, etc.
- **Directives:** speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action, e.g. requesting, commanding, advising, questioning, pleading, inviting, warning, etc.
- **Commissives:** speech acts that commit a speaker to some future action, e.g. promising, threatening, offering, guaranteeing, vowing, betting, challenging, etc.
- **Expressives:** speech acts that express the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition, e.g. congratulating, thanking, apologising, appreciating, complaining, condoling, greeting, scolding, etc.
- **Declaratives:** speech acts that change the reality in accordance with the proposition of the declaration, e.g. baptising, pronouncing someone guilty or pronouncing someone husband and wife, arresting, etc.

The Indirect Speech Act is another manifestation of a speaker's illocution. It is regarded as indirect 'illocutionary' act. According to Yule (2006) direct speech acts are straightforward and in most cases contain performative verbs are used while the indirect speech acts require inferences on the part of the hearer or reader. Searle (1969) describes indirect speech acts as a situation where the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer." With his doctrine of indirect 'illocutionary' act, Searle attempts to explain how it is

possible that a speaker can say something and mean it and additionally mean something else. That is why Mey (2001:194) defines pragmatics as ‘the science of the unsaid’. According to Mey (ibid), indirect speech acts derive their force not just from their lexico-semantic build-up, but from the situation in which they are appropriately uttered (p. 219). An account of such act will require such things as an analysis of mutually shared background information about the conversation, as well as of rationality and linguistic conventions.

Several works have been carried out on political discourse in Nigeria from different linguistic perspectives such as syntax, stylistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis but none has carried out linguistic analysis of hate speeches used in the 2015 general election in order to underscore the importance of language use in politics. This laid claim to Beard’s (2000:2) position that ‘looking at the language of political rhetoric as an occupation is important because it helps to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power’. In the terrain of Nigeria's political discourse, Ayodabo (1997) carried out a Pragma-stylistic study of Abiola’s Historical speech of June 24, 1993 with the aim of identifying the types of speech acts present. Awonuga (2005) examined the linguistic features manifested in the broadcast of President Olusegun Obasanjo to the nation on August 23, 2002 entitled “Sustenance of Democracy”. Ayoola (2005) examined President Olusegun Obasanjo,s address to the national assembly on the speaker’s third term bid in office from a critical discourse analysis perspective. Adetunji (2006) carried out a pragmatic study of the functions of deixis in selected speeches of Obasanjo.

Furthermore, Opeibi (2005) examined negative political campaigns in Nigerian political discourse and noted that politicians employ smear campaigns with the goal of discrediting, damaging and blackmailing the opponent. Opeibi (2009) later carried out a sociolinguistic study in which he investigates the role of political communication in stabilizing democratic governance by exploring and clarifying the interrelationships among language, politics and governance. Adeyanju (2009) investigated features of political speeches in English by some prominent Nigerian leaders (Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo and Gen. Ibrahim Babangida) from a pragmatic perspective. It discovers that a sequence of direct and indirect illocutionary acts used by the speakers dovetailed into the quest for acceptance and cooperation in the polity. Taiwo (2007) examined ways in which the press satirises public office-holders and how politicians lampoon their opponents during the campaign for the 2007 general elections in Nigeria. Taiwo (2009) then examined the enactment of power in political discourse using the speech delivered by Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria at an elders’ or stakeholders’ meeting of his party-PDP. The study reveals the speaker exercise discourse power to emphasize his party’s legitimization and intimidate the opposition with his description of the then forthcoming election as “do-or –die”. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) identified the speech act features of President Umaru Yar’ Adua’s victory and inaugural speeches. Hence, the study examined functions of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the speeches.

This study differs from previous ones on political discourse in Nigeria because it focuses on the pragmatic study of hate speeches made during campaigns preceding the 2015 general elections.

SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECHES

- **Locution:** If the 2015 elections are rigged, the party will not recognize the
 - Outcome and will go ahead and form a parallel government. (*Leadership*

- *November 21, 2014)*
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: assertive (predicting)
 - Indirect: directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** You should not be bothered with ‘cockroaches of politics’.

Cockroaches are only in the toilets even at home. If you see a cockroach in your house, crush them.
(Premium Times, November 19, 2014)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: directive (ordering)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** incitement
- **Locution:** There will be bloodshed and those who feel short-changed may take the war path and the country may not be the same again. *(Osun Defender, December 2, 2013)*
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** 2015 is more than do-or-die. You are a man and I am a man, we

are going to meet at the battle field. *(News Express May 3, 2014)*
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: commissive (threatening)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** If what happened in 2011 should happen again in 2015, the dog

and the baboon would all be soaked in blood. *(Vanguard Newspaper, May 15, 2012)*
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (predicting)

- Indirect: Directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** “Nigerians be warned! I have set before the life and death...”
(*Sahara Reporters, January 29, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Commissive (appealing)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** caution
- **Locution:** Will you allow history to repeat itself? (*Sahara Reporters, January 29, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Directive (questioning)
 - Indirect: Verdictive (evaluating)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** caution and discouragement (electorates are discouraged from voting for a particular candidate)
- **Locution:** Enough of state burials. (*Sahara Reporters, January 29, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect Directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** discouragement (attempt to discourage electorates from voting for a particular candidate)
- **Locution:** On Saturday, if anyone of you goes against Ambode, who I picked, that is your end. (*The Herald, April 6, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Commissive (vowing)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and coercion to vote for a candidate
- **Locution:** Don’t vote bloodletting (*Punch Newspaper, January 22, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**

- Direct Assertive (stating)
- Indirect Directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and coercion to vote for a candidate
- **Locution:** No matter how many pretty robes you wear, once a tyrant is always a tyrant. (*The Guardian Newspaper, January 23, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Expressive (scolding)
 - Indirect: Verdictive (judging)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and coercion to vote for a candidate
- **Locution:** Don't fall for deception or its agents of darkness (*The Sun Newspaper, January 24, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** caution and discouragement (from voting for opposition party)
- **Locution:** The man shares the same vision with "Boko Haram" (terrorists) (*Vanguard Newspaper, January 18, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Declarative (confirming)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and discouragement (from voting for the candidate of opposition party)
- **Locution:** Anybody that comes to you and tell you "change", stone that person. (*The Nation, Sunday March 15, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Directive (urging)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** incitement
- **Locution:** Those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die (*Punch Newspaper, July 17, 2014*)
- **Illocutionary act**

- Direct: Assertive (affirming)
- Indirect: Commissive (threatening)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** We assure those cold-blooded murderers that this time, their blood thirsty campaign will not go unreplied. (*Vanguard Newspaper, December 5, 2014*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (affirming)
 - Indirect: Commissive (threatening)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** It's going to be rig and roast. We are prepared not to go to court but drive them out. (*Tell Magazine, July 7, 2014*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Declarative (affirming)
 - Indirect: Commissive (threatening)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** fear and anxiety
- **Locution:** Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general elections are free and fair, it may be the last election in the history of the nation. (*Leadership, March 29, 2012*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (predicting)
 - Indirect: directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** anxiety and fear
- **Locution:** Nigeria needs a true Nationalist to pilot its affairs; not an ethnic Jingoist or disguised religious fanatic. (*Nigerian Tribune, January 30, 2015*)
- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: assertive (stating)
 - Indirect: Verdictive (assessing)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** caution and anxiety
- **Locution:** God willing, by 2015, something will happen. The either conduct or go a very disgraceful way. (*Vanguard Newspaper, May 15, 2012*)

- **Illocutionary act**
 - Direct: Assertive (saying)
 - Indirect: Directive (warning)
- **Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** Fear and anxiety

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Speech Act Types

Speech Act (Direct and Indirect)	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Assertive	17	42.5%
Directive	11	27.5%
Commissive	6	15%
Verdictive	3	7.5%
Declarative	2	5%
Expressive	1	2.5%
Total	40	100%

DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS

As earlier stated, the Speech Act theory serves as the analytical tool of the present study and we discovered that the five categories of Searle's (1969) speech acts manifested with verdictives category from Austin's (1962) SAT. Analysis of data revealed that each of the utterances performed both direct and indirect illocutionary acts. This implies that the speeches uttered by different speakers performed both explicit and implicit functions. In other words they meant more than what was uttered. The fact that all the sentences had both direct and indirect speech acts brought the total number of the illocutionary acts in the twenty sentences to forty. The direct speech acts were mainly in the category of assertive with an instance of directive and declarative. The indirect speech acts fall within the categories of directives, commissives, verdictives and declaratives.

In a global macro-speech act sense, the totality of the speeches selected and analysed in our data displayed efforts made by politicians to intimidate or threaten perceived political opponents, warn the electorate in their attempt to win election power peacefully through votes or seize power forcefully through violence. This is revealed in the Overall Relative Frequency Percentages (ORFPs) table where speakers had used high number of sentences categorized as assertives 45% to say or predict doom, lawlessness and violence; directives 27.5% mainly to warn; commissives 15% to threaten perceived political opponents; verdictive 7.5%; declarative 5% while expressive has lowest occurrence of 2.5%.

CONCLUSIONS

So far in this paper, we have attempted to establish an interrelationship between utterances and actions, and demonstrate that political communications such as campaign are intended to generate reactions from the populace. The study has shown that Nigerian political rhetoric during 2015 campaign was characterized by elements of hate capable of serving as catalyst to violence, which might endanger not only the nation's democracy but also jeopardize the unity of the country.

The paper therefore recommends that Nigeria's political class and the electorate should be given more education and enlightenment on the tenets of democracy and good governance to avoid future occurrence of hate campaign speeches and ensure strict adherence to the Electoral laws of the country. There is need to strengthen our democratic institutions and appreciate the fact that the success of democracy and good governance is the duty of all citizens.

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